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THE SCIENCE FICTION UNIVERSE®

Peter Macgregor-Scott previews *Batman & Robin* (see page 36).

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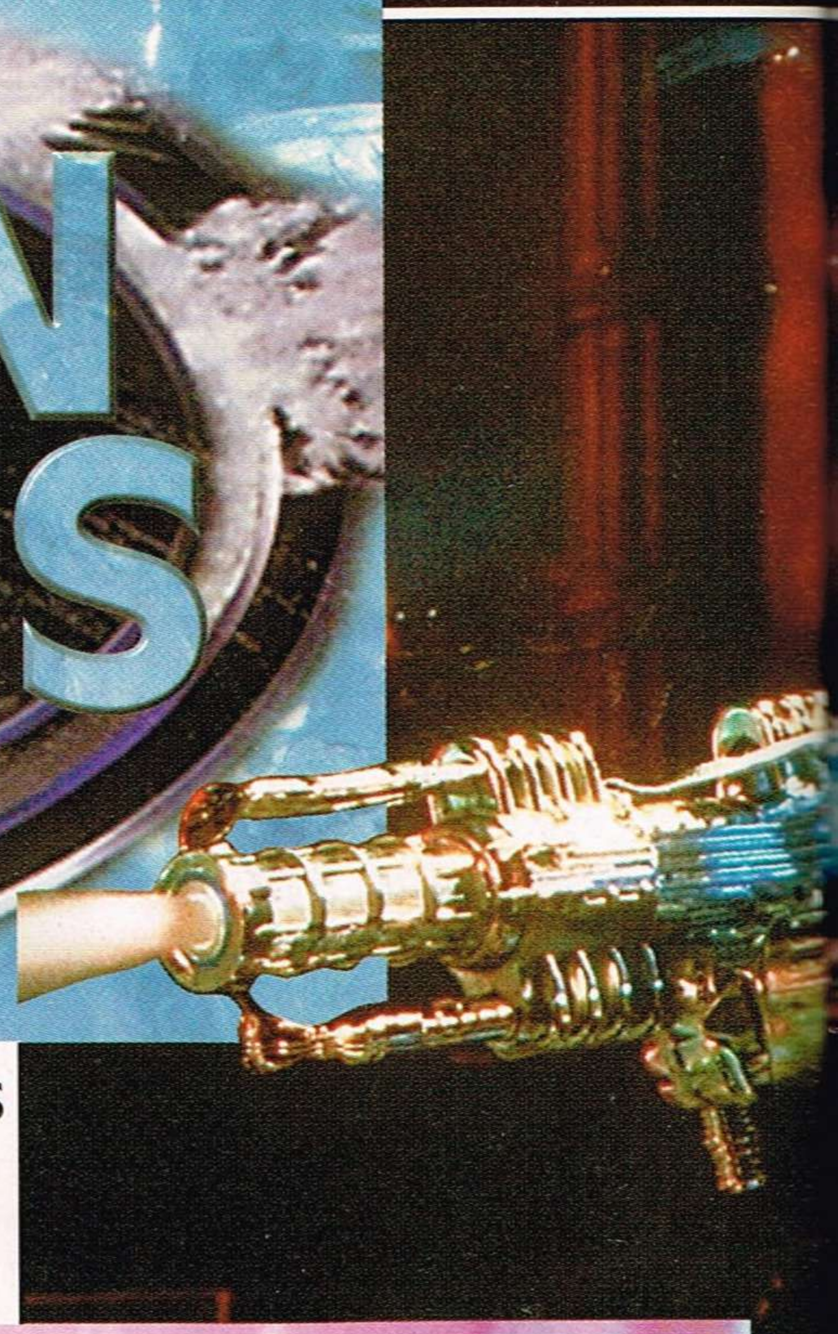
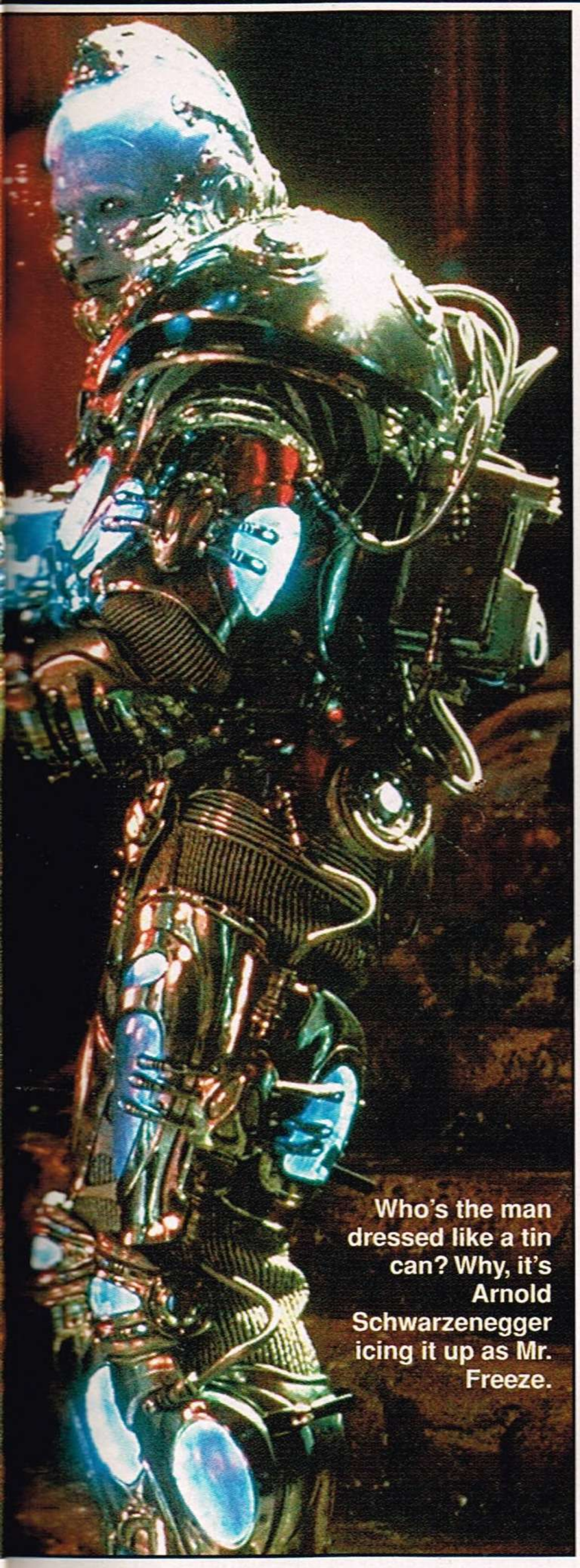
FROZEN KNIGHTS



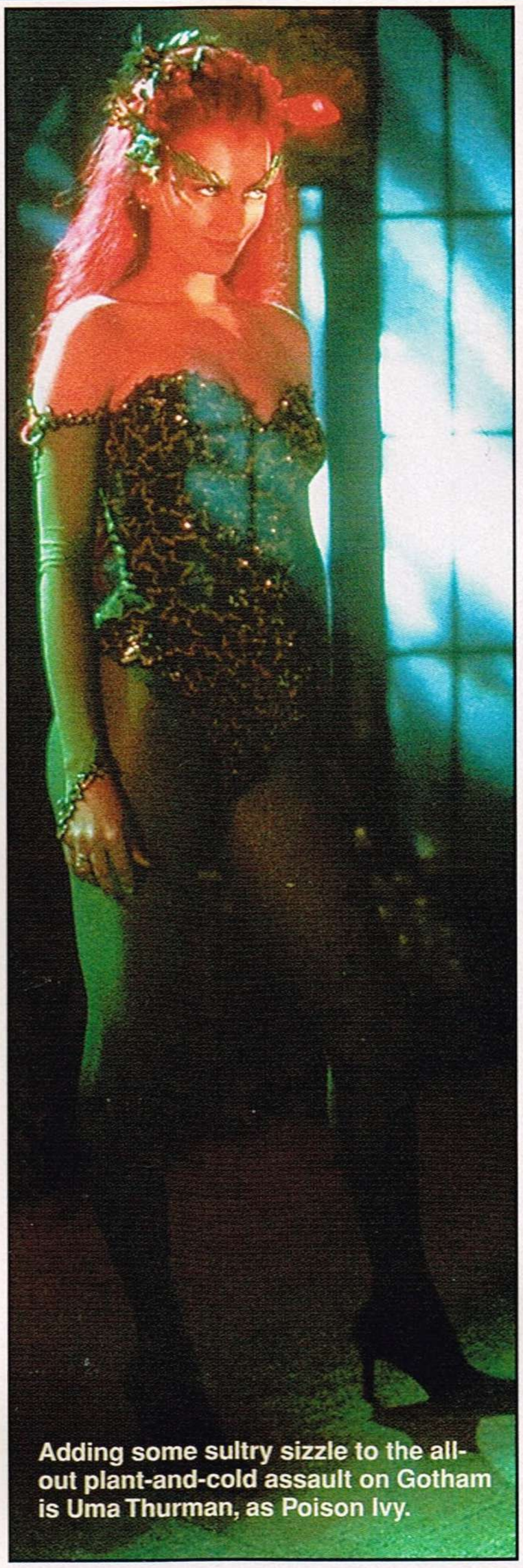
Gotham veteran Peter Macgregor-Scott previews his newest production, *Batman & Robin*.

By MARC SHAPIRO

The Dark Knight and the Boy Wonder take on the hockey team from hell in *Batman & Robin*, the latest big-budget bonanza from producer Peter Macgregor-Scott.



Who's the man dressed like a tin can? Why, it's Arnold Schwarzenegger icing it up as Mr. Freeze.



Adding some sultry sizzle to the all-out plant-and-cold assault on Gotham is Uma Thurman, as Poison Ivy.

Even though he knows why Superman works alone, Batman (George Clooney) is happy to have Robin (Chris O'Donnell) and Batgirl (Alicia Silverstone) at his side.

Peter Macgregor-Scott's morning in *Batman & Robin* production hell began at 7 a.m. on the Warner Bros. lot, where he took a close look at a set integral to some last-minute action inserts. Then, it was a quick trip off the lot to an effects shop where he signed off on some miniatures. Next, time to race back to Warner Bros. to key a sound meeting.

"And that was just before lunch," laughs the producer. "It doesn't get any better than that."

Macgregor-Scott is chronicling his morning escapades during an early afternoon conversation between bites in the *Batman & Robin* production office. He'll be busy for the rest of the day: supervising the editing, process photography and the logistics of the final segment of a major action sequence to be shot in coming weeks. The producer jokingly acknowledges that *Batman* movies do *not* produce themselves.

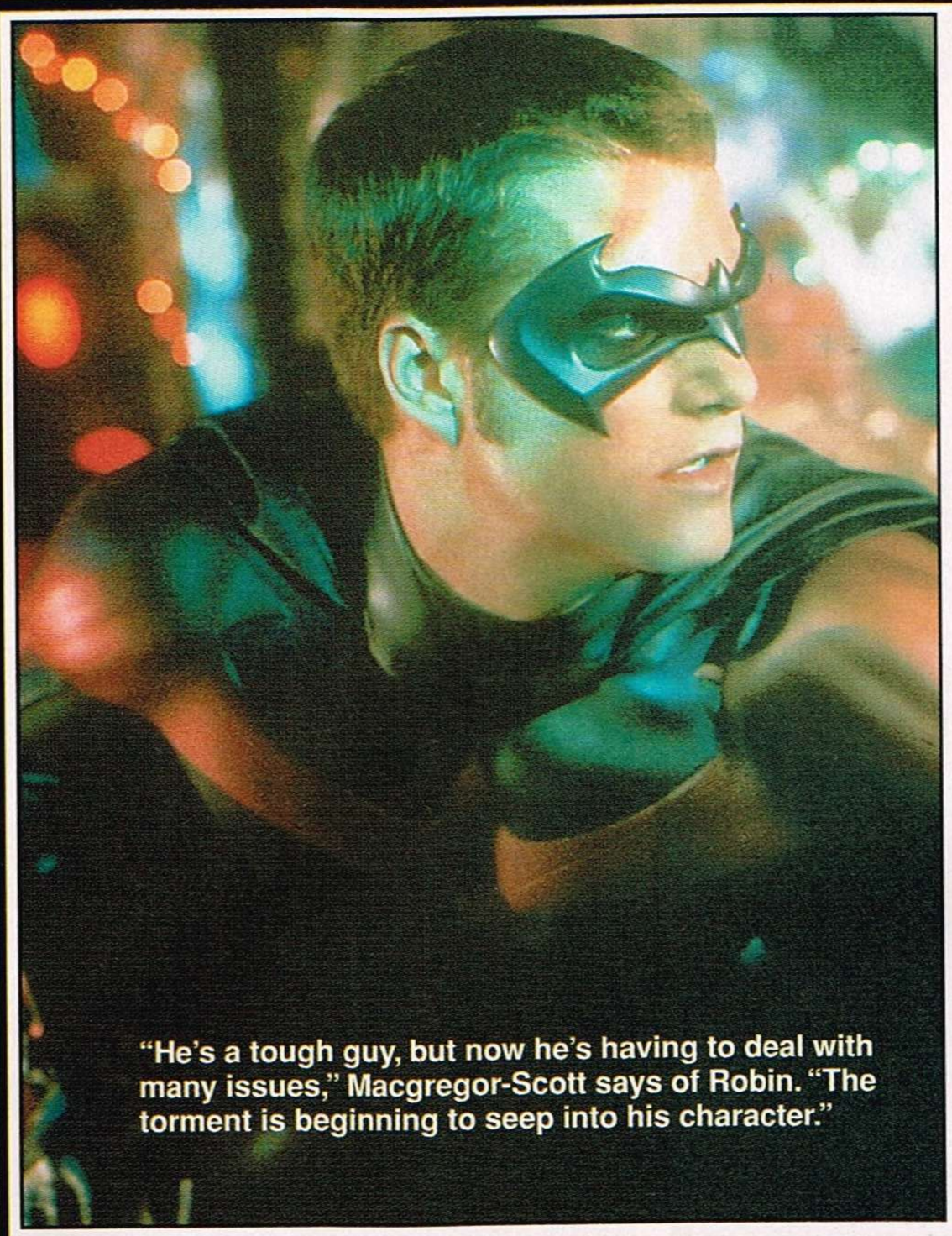
"I would love to say they did," says the producer, "but they definitely don't. *Batman* films take a great deal of time and effort to create and so, as a producer, I'm extremely hands-on."

Macgregor-Scott, producing *Batman & Robin* following his successful baptism by fire with *Batman Forever*, has quickly become a convert to Bat-madness. He often refers to the *Batman* franchise in paternal tones. He has let go of a long-standing pet project, the *Fugitive* spin-off *U.S. Marshals*, to don the producing cape and cowl. And he acknowledges that, in the space of two films, he has definitely fallen under the Dark Knight's spell.

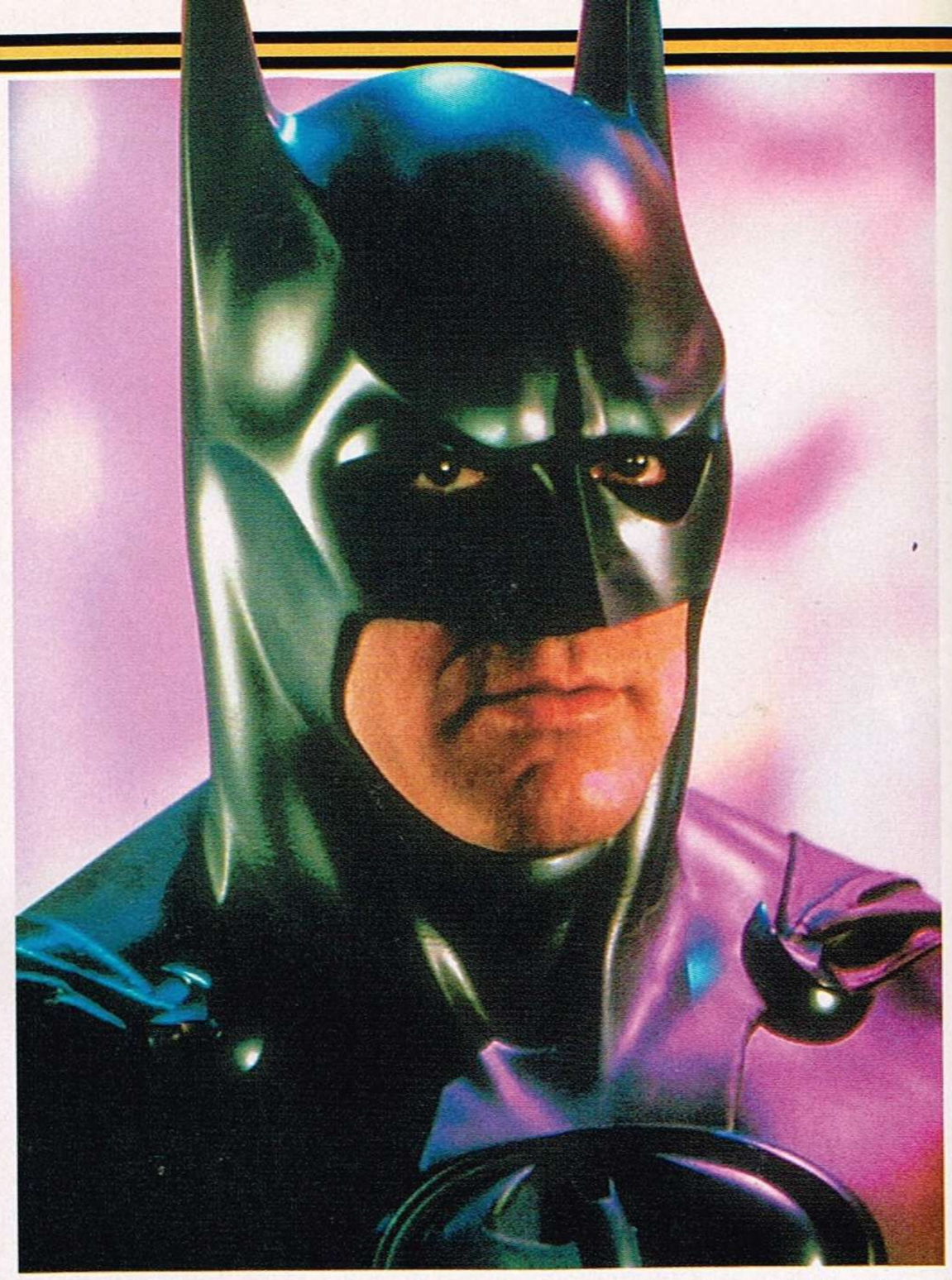
"Making a *Batman* movie is very addictive because the challenges are extremely high. The goal is *always* to make the latest movie better than the previous one. I'm not sure I would want to do back-to-back *Batman* movies for the rest of my life, though. I *do* want to do other things in between. But I would definitely come back to them."

Movie Menagerie

As *Batman & Robin*—again directed by Joel Schumacher from an Akiva Goldsman script—unfolds, we find that Batman (George Clooney) and Robin (Chris O'Donnell) have settled into a solid, if still occasionally stressed, crimefighting partnership. Which is a good thing, because before you can say "bad guys," the dynamic duo is faced with a tag team of terror in the guise of icy Mr. Freeze (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and lovely Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman), who have pooled their personal tragedies and lust for power into an all-out assault on Gotham City. Barbara Wilson (Alicia Silverstone), a mysterious young woman with a murky past, joins the fray on the side of good as Batgirl. The expected battle royale features spectacular sequences, including Batman and Robin skyboarding to earth and a breathless car chase along Gotham's rooftops.



"He's a tough guy, but now he's having to deal with many issues," Macgregor-Scott says of Robin. "The torment is beginning to seep into his character."



"The story is serious business." That has been true since Bob Kane, with an assist from Bill Finger, created Batman.

"*Batman* films take a great deal of time of time and effort to create," notes Macgregor-Scott, and by the look of the set, one can see why.

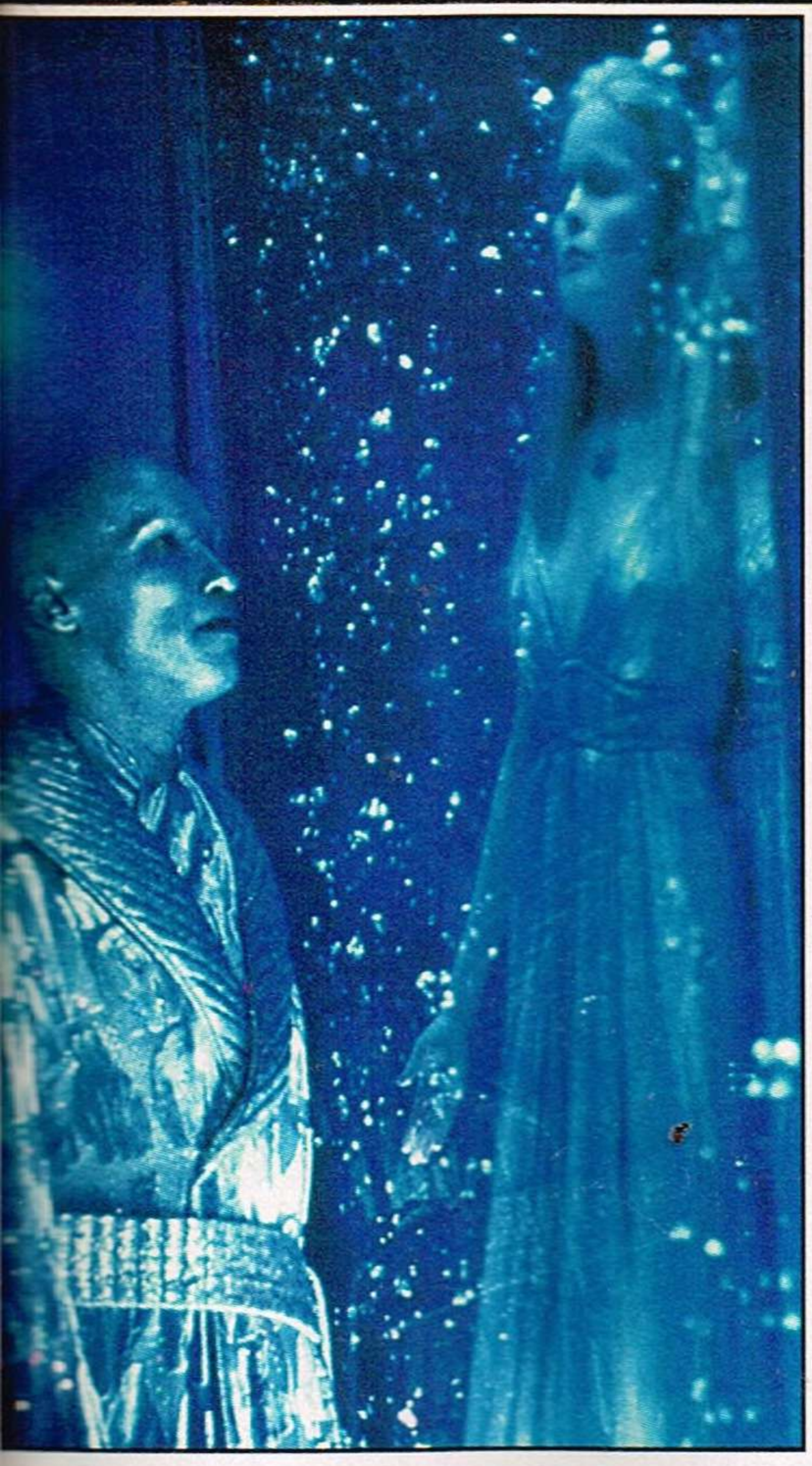
Returning for their fourth *Batman* film are Michael Gough and Pat Hingle as the loyal butler Alfred and Commissioner Gordon. Elizabeth Sanders reprises her Gossip Gerty role (introduced in *Batman Forever*). New to the adventure are John Glover as the insidious Dr. Jason Woodrue, Jeep Swenson as the formidable Bane, supermodel Elle Macpherson as Bruce Wayne's girl friend Julie Madison, Vivica A. Fox as Ms. B Haven and supermodel Vendela as Mr. Freeze's wife Nora.

Key creative personnel, all returning from past Bat-films, are production designer Barbara Ling, director of photography Stephen Goldblatt, film editor Dennis Virkler, visual FX supervisor John Dykstra, hair stylist Yolanda Toussieng, makeup artist Ve Neill, special makeup artist Rick Baker and composer Elliot Goldenthal.

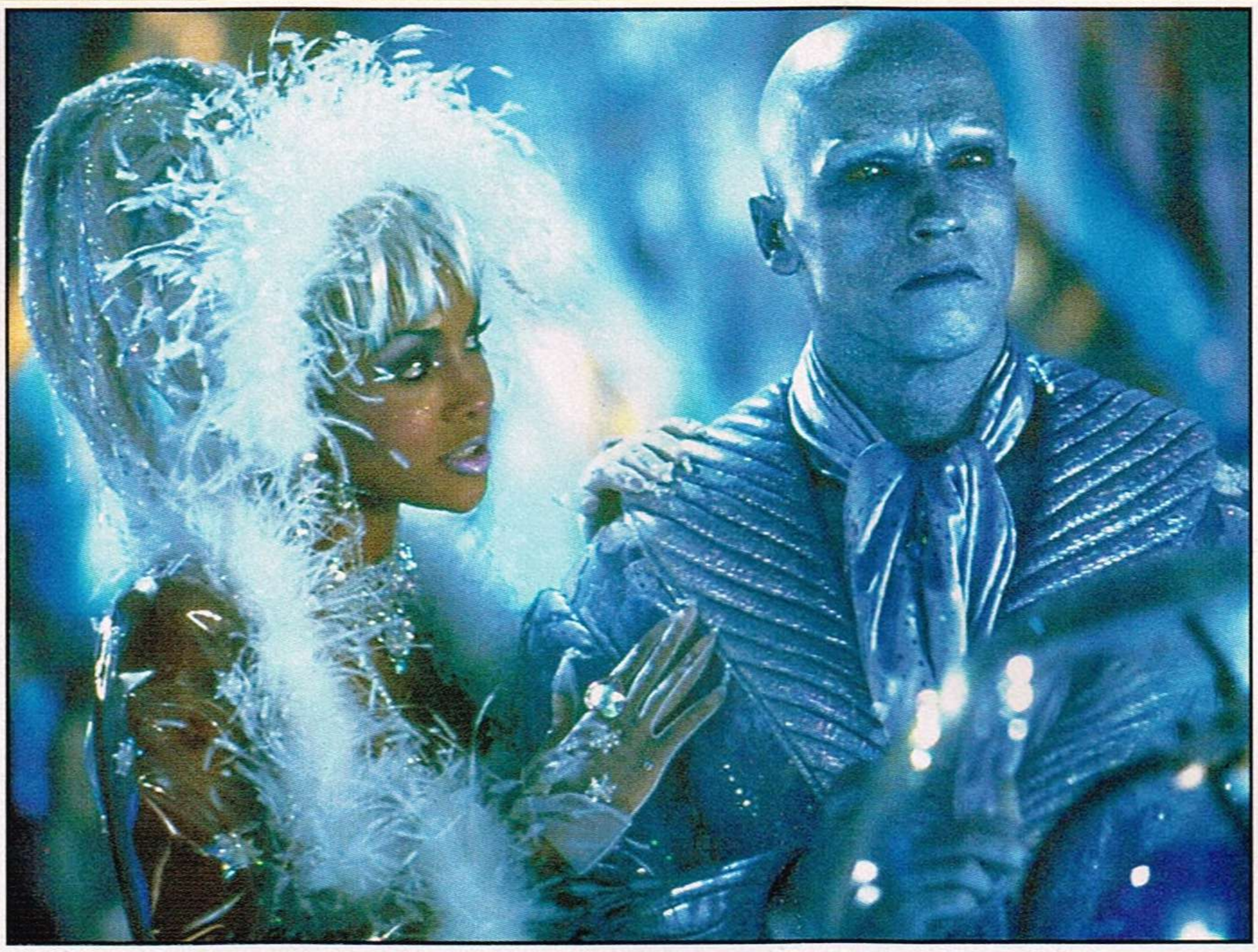
Macgregor-Scott agrees that the *Batman* franchise has thrived despite the Dark Knight being played by three different actors. He cites the multiple James Bonds as a prime example of how Batman has been able to get away with it. "I don't think it's so much that we're getting away with something as it is we're doing something that *continues* to work. Changing actors brings a fresh approach to Batman. George is different from Michael [Keaton] and he's different from Val [Kilmer]. We're making a comic book movie and, in the comics, different artists have drawn Batman over the years. Consequently, the look of Batman has changed over the years. So why shouldn't the look change in the movies as well?"

All Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros. Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

All Photos: Christine Loss/Copyright 1997 DC Comics



A touch of sadness (from the *Batman* animated series) has been added. This Mr. Freeze pines for his frozen wife (Vendela).



After *Independence Day*, Vivica A. Fox found another blockbuster to slink in. Now, she's Ms. B Haven for Mr. Freeze.

"No matter how many villains and characters we have, *everything* that happens in the *Batman* movies keys off of the actions of Batman," Macgregor-Scott says. To that end, Bane (Jeep Swenson) joins the triumvirate of evil in *Batman & Robin*.

But the producer is candid enough to admit that there was creative friction between Schumacher and Kilmer on *Batman Forever*, so "extra care was taken in getting just the right actor to play Batman/Bruce Wayne in *Batman & Robin*. It was a decision involving many hands. But I believe we've made the right decision with George Clooney. George's approach to playing Bruce Wayne is much more accessible than Val's was. Val played Bruce very aloof. George's approach is to play him as a much more humane, endearing character. To be fair, Val was a great Batman. But George is a terrific Batman. He's quite physical and when he's injured, he can fix his own wounds," jokes the producer in reference to Clooney's *ER* credentials.

Gotham Grotesquerie

Macgregor-Scott offers that, unlike the vestiges of angst and torment that haunted Bruce Wayne in *Batman Forever*, *Batman & Robin*, at least as it pertains to the Dark Knight, will be torment-free. "We haven't gotten totally away from the tortured hero, but Bruce Wayne *will* be less emotionally disturbed. We feel the parental issue was resolved with the last picture and, as we grow with this character, we'll see that he's better able to resolve his problems.

"Robin, however, is something different," the producer continues. "He's a tough guy, but he's now having to deal with many issues and you will see, in this movie, that the torment is beginning to seep into his character."

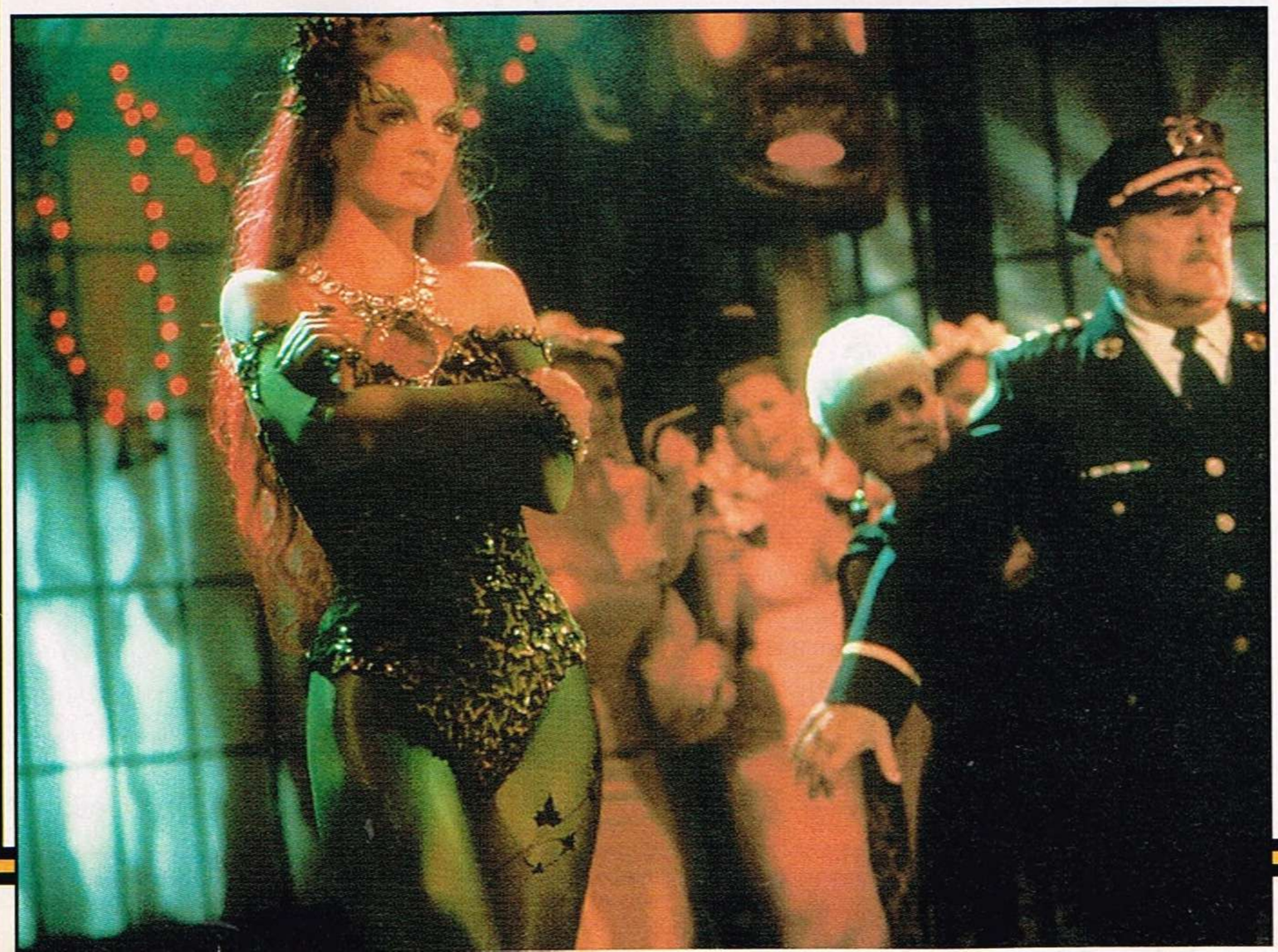
Given the overabundance of angst, it seems a rather risky decision to introduce Batgirl into this highly testosterized mix. But Macgregor-Scott disagrees. "I don't see it as a risk. Yes, it will change the dynamic of the relationship between Batman and Robin. But all we've done by introducing Batgirl is to speed up the evolution of the comic book to film time. It took something like 20 years before Batgirl was introduced in the comic. We felt it was important to get her into the movies *now*, because we feel having a young heroine is very important to the future of the franchise."

And this is a franchise top-heavy with villains. With Mr. Freeze, Poison Ivy and, to a slightly lesser degree, Bane dotting the Gotham City skyline, it seems that Batman, as has been his lot in previous films, has been relegated to the rear.

"No matter how many villains and characters we have, *everything* that happens in the *Batman* movies keys off of the actions of Batman and Bruce Wayne. There have to be villains in order for Batman to exist in society. If we got rid of all the villains, then Batman would hang up his suit. But, because Batman will always have to defend Gotham

Joining Bruce Wayne for the Bat-festivities this time are Bruce's girl friend (Elle Macpherson) and Gossip Gerty (Elizabeth Sanders).

Michael Gough reprises his role as Alfred, Bruce Wayne's aged manservant.



City and its citizens, he will certainly never get lost in the shuffle."

Macgregor-Scott notes that the tone of *Batman Forever* and now *Batman & Robin* is "much closer to the comic book than the first two movies." But while he concedes that the series has lost some of its edge, he doesn't believe it suffers as a result.

"I still think there's *some* edge to the movies, but not quite as much as in the first two. But we continue to have bigger-than-life characters. Kids and women are enjoying the newer films more than the early ones. The first two were very dark and we've decided to move towards a funnier, less raw version of Batman. The movies have become funny and very hip, but we haven't gone too far and become the Adam West Batman."

Innovative Imagery

Macgregor-Scott explains that working with the same director and writer on a second Bat-film has, in comparison to *Batman Forever*, been an easier task. "Joel has this tremendous ability to know what he can achieve on film. On *Batman Forever*, I felt like we were making three *Fugitives* at the same time, but he was always in control. Having been there, *Batman & Robin*, despite being a much bigger picture, was much easier to do. Akiva proved to be the perfect team player. The script came together much easier this time, and there were less revisions."

But the producer is the first to admit that *Batman & Robin* was not challenge-free. He cites the FX arsenal, which makes massive use of computer-generated images, miniatures and full-sized models, as the "equivalent of having five train wrecks going on at the same time." Schwarzenegger's schedule,

Is Commissioner Gordon (Pat Hingle, right) the most inept peace officer in Gotham? Well, every time a bad guy shows up, he runs to someone who wears tights. You make the call...

"As soon as Uma Thurman put on her costume," Macgregor-Scott reveals, "she became Poison Ivy."

It's also true of Schwarzenegger. "Arnold put on his costume and immediately found the character," the producer states.

which required working around a six-week block of time at the film's beginning and a two-week block at the end, "did not hinder the production in the slightest." He does indicate that Clooney's double duty on *ER* and *Batman* caused its share of difficulties. "George had to take two days off in the middle of the week so he could do *ER*, and then we would make up those days on the weekend. So, we were basically working seven days a week for 19 weeks. From a humanitarian standpoint, it was *not* the ideal way to make a movie."

Then, there were the varying degrees of experience of the players with the Batman Universe. "The repeat players were excellent, and they were able to step right into the comfortable shoes. For the new people, there's always some trepidation jumping into a franchise movie, but they tended to get into the swing of things pretty quickly. As soon as Uma put on her costume, she became Poison Ivy. Arnold put on his costume and immediately found the character. George probably had the most to learn. But he's very experienced with the technical side of moviemaking. He was very savvy. Joel would explain something to him once and he would immediately get it."

Macgregor-Scott is well aware that people expect *Batman & Robin* to have nothing but wall-to-wall action. "But the story is serious business. The story is the driver. If we didn't have a good story, then all the effects in the world wouldn't save this movie from going down the toilet. Mixing the story and effects are the challenge. When you achieve that mix, then you have success."

Although the Hollywood trade papers are trumpeting Schumacher's agreement to do a fifth Bat-flick and that a script is already in development, Macgregor-Scott sidesteps the question of his own possible involvement. "How can I say anything about another one when I haven't finished this one yet? I'm inclined to do the next one but, for me, it's a little early." But not too early to speculate on what a fifth film might bring to the table.

"Multiple villains is something that's *not* set in stone. Under the right circumstances, we could go back to a single villain. It's a possibility with the next film, but Joel hasn't made any decisions about what he wants to do. We've also talked about the films returning to the darker image of the first two movies at some point, although that's a call that has not yet been made. Any tone changes would be driven by the villain, but I do think the tone of future films will definitely change."

One element of the current state of the film biz that Macgregor-Scott feels strongly should change is the idea of releasing big-budget films one on top of the other during the summer months. "I wish the studios would spread things out more. A good picture will do good business whenever it comes out. Unfortunately, many good pictures will come out at the same time, and there's only so many times an audience can go see a movie in a given year. But I don't see *The Lost World* hurting us. We're a franchise and we have our audience. We certainly have a broader base with this film and this cast than any that have come before."

In a light moment, Peter Macgregor-Scott agrees with the notion that "it would be tempting" to try on the Batman cowl. He has not actually done that but, on *Batman Forever*, he recalls doing something equally outrageous. "We were at Lake Castaic shooting the scene with Robin in the Bat-boat. The boat was sitting there between takes and I said, 'I've just got to drive this thing!' So, I just jumped in and took off. It was fabulous, but I really *shouldn't* have done it. The worst thing that could have happened was that I, the film's producer, would end up driving the boat onto the rocks."